

Daniel 4:1-18 – Another Troubling Dream

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were a drastic contrast to what their fellow Jews had been doing back in Jerusalem. Back in Jerusalem, they had been worshipping idols voluntarily. They did not do it because they were threatened. They did it because they willingly rebelled against the one true God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were willing to be thrown into a fiery furnace rather than worship an idol. Which is harder to resist, your friends telling you to worship an idol or your enemies telling you to worship an idol? Daniel reappears in chapter 4 after not being mentioned in chapter 3.

Read Daniel 4:1-12.

We don't know exactly when chapter 4 occurred. It is reasonable to assume that chapter 4 chronologically followed chapter 3 for reasons that will become apparent in chapter 4. In 3:29, Nebuchadnezzar made a decree that no one was to speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Some commentators refer to chapter 4 as an edict or decree. I'm not sure what the law is in chapter 4. It sounds more like a general proclamation. Do you think this is an edict or a general proclamation or something else? In verse 2, what did the king want people to know? What significance did the end of verse 3 have to the king? The end of verse 3 was also the message of chapter 2. See 2:44. This message basically bookends the chapter. See 4:34. (4:1-3)

In verses 4 and 5, Nebuchadnezzar was in his palace and he had another dream. How did the king respond to the dream? (4:4-5)

When reading verses 6-8, Yogi Berra might have said "It's like déjà vu all over again." What did the king do to determine the interpretation of the dream. What is one big difference between the king's response to the dream in chapter 2 versus chapter 4? Like chapter 2, the "wise men" of Babylon were not able to tell the dream's interpretation to the king. Do you think they didn't understand the dream or do you think they did understand it but didn't want to be the bearer of bad news? (4:6-8)

In verse 9, what did Nebuchadnezzar say about Daniel? Daniel was chief of the magicians. Why do you think he was called after all the other "wise men"? (4:9)

In verses 10-12, where did the king have this new vision? Instead of a metal image, what object appeared in this dream? How was the object described? We don't have any record of the king planting a tree and letting it grow to a large size and then demanding that everyone bow down to worship it. People have been known to worship trees. Maybe Nebuchadnezzar learned a lesson from chapter 3. (4:10-12)

I'm not an interpreter of dreams, but given that the last dream involved Nebuchadnezzar, the gold head of the image, and given the size of the tree in this dream, I might have guessed that the tree may have had something to do with Nebuchadnezzar and / or his kingdom. Hindsight can be 20/20.

Read Daniel 4:13-18.

Just as in the first dream, this dream contained divine intervention. See 2:34, 44. What did the divine intervention involve in this dream? ESV, NKJV, NASB and NIV all agree on "holy one". ESV and NKJV have "a watcher". NASB has "angelic watcher". NIV has "messenger". Since the holy one decreed that the tree should be chopped down, the big question was "who is the tree"? What clues were there that the tree was actually a person? Captain Obvious would observe that you would not want to be the tree from this dream. (4:13-16)

In verse 17, what was the message of the dream to all "the living"? (4:17)

In verse 18, why was Nebuchadnezzar confident that Daniel could tell him the interpretation of the dream? (4:18)

What is remarkable about chapters 2 to 4 is that God was communicating with a heathen king, a king who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. King Jehoiakim and King Zedekiah in Jerusalem seemed to have little to no interest in hearing a message from God. An example is found in Jeremiah 36 where Jehoiakim burned Jeremiah's scroll as it was read. In chapters 2 to 4, Nebuchadnezzar responded positively to God's messages and signs. If you were a Jew during the time of Nebuchadnezzar, would this make you jealous, angry, happy or something else?